



LITERARY CRITICISM

Richard M. Dolan. *UFOs and the National Security State: Chronology of a Cover-up 1941-1973*, Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Charlottesville, Virginia, 2002. \$15.95

This is a revised edition of a book first published in 2000. The blurb describes the author as a “gifted historian”, which suggests that this work is an objective, scholarly history of American ufology. It is certainly not objective. Dolan is a great admirer of the work of Donald Keyhoe, and one of his aims is to rehabilitate his reputation among ufologists or, at least, Serious Ufologists, as Jim Moseley calls them. Of course, the book is not written in the Keyhoe style, but more in the style of David Jacobs’s *The UFO Controversy in America*, which it in many ways resembles, particularly in its support for the ETH and general credulity.

The most disturbing aspect of the book is the impression given by the author that he regards one source as being as good as another. In support of his thesis that the US government is concealing the truth about incursions by aliens from space, he quotes from writers ranging from the reliable and scrupulously honest to the hucksters and pathological liars, and the majority to be found between these two extremes. One example is an account of a dramatic encounter of an American plane with foo fighters over the Pacific in August 1945. “The navigational needles went wild, the left engine faltered and spurted oil, the plane lost altitude, and the crew prepared to ditch. Then, in a close formation, the objects faded into a cloud bank. At that moment, the plane’s engines restarted, and the crew safely flew on. One of the plane’s passengers was future UFO researcher Leonard Stringfield.”

Of course there were some puzzling foo fighter incidents, but surely such a report requires independent confirmation before it can be accepted as genuine, especially as it comes from someone known for publishing wild UFO tales from anonymous sources.

It has long been a tradition among writers of sensationalist UFO literature to attribute the deaths of ufologists or persons connected, or imagined to be connected, with official UFO investigations to the activities of government agencies, or even to the UFOs themselves. Incredibly, Dolan plays this game

in a book which purports to be the first part of a serious history of the topic.

Some writers consider the death of US Defense Secretary James Forrestal after leaving office in 1949 to be mysterious. They do not accept the official story that he committed suicide by jumping from a window at Bethesda Naval Hospital where he was being treated for a mental breakdown. They think he was pushed out of the window. This may or may not be true but, you might ask, what has it got to do with UFOs? Dolan devotes six pages to a discussion of the circumstances surrounding Forrestal’s death and tries to justify this by resorting to the absurd speculations indulged in by the writers of ufological pot-boilers. “In the first place, Forrestal’s position within the defense community made him *de facto* a key player in the formulation of UFO policy. The problem was of great importance to people high up the national security food chain: we can infer that Forrestal, too, had an interest, even though the official records and biographers of Forrestal are silent about UFOs.”

Dolan speculates that perhaps Forrestal did commit suicide because he had learned the Dreadful Truth about UFOs. “An explanation centring on the UFO phenomenon accounts better than most for the complete unhinging of a successful and brilliant individual, and more importantly, the need to silence someone who could no longer be trusted. Did Forrestal learn a truth about UFOs that contributed to his breakdown?”

Dolan does not give us a shred of evidence that Forrestal was bothered about, or even interested in, UFO reports, either professionally or otherwise.

He is also suspicious about the death of Edward Ruppelt. This is because he had become increasingly sceptical about UFOs since leaving Project Blue Book and had died of a heart attack at the early age of 37, after publishing a revision of his book *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects* with three new chapters debunking UFOs added to it. Dolan accepts the line that pressure was put on Ruppelt to make sceptical noises about UFOs, to the

extent that he developed serious heart trouble. He criticises Jerome Clark for not being dismissive of the explanation given by Ruppelt's widow that he became disillusioned about UFOs as a result of continued contact with Blue Book personnel and exposure to the contactee movement of southern California. Indeed, whenever Dolan mentions Clark he usually criticises him for being too sceptical!

Then there was the death of Dr James McDonald. Most ufologists, including that notorious sceptic Jerome Clark, believe he committed suicide, for personal rather than ufological reasons. Dolan, though, considers that he must have been a nuisance to those who were desperately attempting to conceal the UFO evidence, so he could have been murdered. "The *how* part was really no matter at all. By the early 1970s, there were already means available to alter the moods of unsuspecting persons. A pocket-sized transmitter generating electromagnetic (EM) energy at less than 100 milliwatts could do the job."

Where important UFO reports are concerned, Dolan repeatedly rubbishes official explanations. Of course some of these explanations were obviously wrong, but there were some cases which were properly investigated and solved. For example, the radar/visual incident of August 1953 at Rapid City, South Dakota, was investigated by Hynek, who gave a perfectly logical, if not very simple, explanation. Dolan, however, prefers Ruppelt's failure to explain it and gives no details of Hynek's analysis.

This sort of thing is one of the main failings of the book. The author apparently has no knowledge of, or interest in, scientific and technical matters. He thus evaluates reports on the basis of choosing those he wants to believe as the best ones. He also shows no interest in the sociological and psychological factors which generate many (but not all) UFO reports, and the distortions of perception which can occur when witnesses do not know what they are looking at. He doesn't even mention the psychosocial hypothesis, and gives his readers only two choices as to what UFOs might be—secret military aircraft or extraterrestrial spacecraft. He rejects the first alternative leaving only the second, all other possibilities apparently not being worth discussing.

Like most ETH supporters, Dolan believes that the US government (and presumably all other governments) are keeping the Truth about UFOs secret. "When UFO skeptics claim that hiding something as significant as alien visitation is impossible, they should study some of the secrets that were kept for many, many years." What he doesn't tell us is that these secrets were about things over which government agencies had control, such as the

Manhattan Project which he gives as an example. Whatever UFOs might be, it is generally agreed that the US government, and other governments, have no control over them. They can appear anywhere at any time. How, then, can they be kept secret? This is a question always dodged by the believers.

This book is yet another example of American ufology stuck firmly in the 1950s, along with the shades of people like Donald Keyhoe and Frank Edwards.

John Harney

Jenny Randles. *Supernatural Pennines*, Hale, 2002. £18.99

Another typical Jenny Randles curate's egg book, with interesting stories which remind us of how many weird things people report, by no means all (or even most) of which fit into any kind of conventional pigeon hole. Of course there must be some question as to whether these are special to what Jenny calls window areas, or whether you couldn't find just as many anywhere if you were prepared to devote the time and effort into looking for them. To be fair though, boring old Trafford seems to be a pretty Fortean-free zone. Wild country places are obviously much more atmospheric—and photogenic as the excellent pictures show—than, say, Widnes on a wet Wednesday. My Brigantian heart wishes it was all true, however. We would have the real thing, while our English neighbours would have to make do with the commercialised tat of Glastonbury and the fading nostalgia of Warminster.

Jenny thinks that some pretty unusual atmospheric phenomena are going on there, and that it is a pity that the atmosphere of true belief prevents scientists taking a look at them. Fine words, but the trouble is Jenny herself can't stop wittering on with pseudoscientific speculation about time warps and the like. Even worse is her re-raking up the corpse of poor old Zigmund Adamski to make a mystery where there is none, save that of human motivation. Why are paranormalists always their own worst enemies?

Peter Rogerson

Jay Rayner. *Star Dust Falling: the story of the plane that vanished*. Doubleday, 2002. £12.99

On 2 August 1947, the British South American Airlines plane Star Dust disappeared en route from Buenos Aires to Santiago. Its last message minutes before the landing time was routine, until it ended with the mysterious letters STENDEC spelled out in Morse three times. Then it disappeared.

The story of the Star Dust became one of the classic unsolved mysteries of aviation, and the

English writer Harold T. Wilkins in his book *Flying Saucers From the Moon* (a.k.a. *Flying Saucers on the Attack*), a massive potpourri of UFO and Fortean lore, introduced the story into the UFO corpus.

"Who twice sent out that mysterious word *Stendec*? Did "something" intercept the plane, If so what was it?" he asked. Wilkins answered himself: "Suppose that it was one of these vast (interplanetary) craft which flashed out the mysterious code *Stendec* . . . For what spot far out in space, for what world not ours was the word *Stendec* intended?" This haunting last message became emblematic of unnameable mystery, a hint of the absolute other for which there is neither word nor concept. As such it became, misspelled STENDEK, the title of a well known 1970s Spanish UFO magazine. It became associated with the mysterious fate of its confreres Star Tiger and Star Ariel, and assimilated into the mystery of the Bermuda Triangle, a continent's width away.

In Argentina and Chile, another legend grew up over the plane, that of the treasure plane laden with gold bars, there for the taking for those who could brave the high snows

However, in 1998 the first wreckage of Star Dust was found in the high Andes, and in this book, Jay Rayner tells the full the story of the crash and the expedition to recover wreckage and bodies. The story which emerges replaces awesome mystery with a very human story of arrogance, folly and greed, and what today would be called corporate manslaughter. It involved the world's most dangerous airline, British South American Airlines, and its presiding genius, Don Bennett, for whom the description psychopath doesn't seem too harsh. As his planes crashed right, left and centre, Bennett consoled himself with the thought that his losses were rather less than those of his war-time Pathfinder squadron on their raids over Germany! No gold, no aliens, and another Fortean classic into the bin. Or almost, for there is still STENDEK for which no solution has yet been found.

Peter Rogerson

Arthur J. Ellison. *Science and the Paranormal: altered states of reality*, Floris Books, 2002. £20.00

Arthur Ellison, who died shortly after completing this book, was for many years the most dominant figure in (some would say virtually dictator of) the Society for Psychical Research and, given the title, it might occur to a general reader that it will provide the latest scientific evidence on the paranormal and its implication for science in general. Someone with a scientific background with little knowledge of

psychical research but keeping an open mind on the subject, might in addition read it to see whether the subject is going to be worth studying.

Both groups of readers are likely to be disappointed, for there is no real discussion of the scientific implications of alleged paranormal experiences; rather what one gets is Ellison's own experience and prejudices, all delivered in a tone in which credulity ("I have rarely met a fraudulent medium") mixes with considerable self satisfaction, and a constant refrain that the whole scientific community is much at fault for being out of step with Arthur Ellison and the SPR.

The perceptive reader might come to the conclusion that Ellison himself is perhaps one of the 'shamanic personalities' discussed by James McClellon, who have all sorts of odd experiences, and are able to (at least temporarily) convince others that they have shared them. Rather than being passive observers of the various wonders described such people are part of the psychological nexus which generates them.

Supporters of the paranormal seem to go in for diametrically opposed views on human perception, some seeing it as a perfect observing and recording apparatus; while some, like Ellison, seem to argue that the whole external world is an illusion. This seems to be the gist of Ellison's argument for idealism, arguing that our world is fashioned by our beliefs in some very fundamental sense. This must be true to some extent, in that our beliefs and expectations may strongly influence our perception of the world. But there are clear limits to this; for example, scientific discoveries often turn out to be very surprising, counter-intuitive or downright unwelcome. Even more profoundly Ellison is quite unable to say how animals which do not have our elaborate verbal culture are able to fashion a coherent world. Furthermore, no matter what our beliefs may be there is no evidence of them allowing us to grow back a severed limb or bounce safely back up again after jumping off a 300-foot cliff.

Indeed it struck me that Ellison's arguments were simply intellectually incoherent. For example, if the world is but an illusion then surely all the 'facts' of psychical research are as illusory as everything else, so what is the point of getting steamed up about them? It is clear that psychical research, as much as electrical engineering, only makes sense as an activity if we assume that there is an external world out there which is in some sense or other modelled in our sensory experience.

Peter Rogerson

LETTERS



Your editorial (No. 39) is certainly provocative, presumably intentionally. I can think of at least one American (Jerome Clark) who will take exception to it.

On a related subject, when a sportsman persistently violates the rules or spirit of a game or sport (cricket, baseball, football, etc) he is said to be 'bringing the game into disrepute'. Confining ourselves to the present, whom would you nominate as the champion for currently bringing ufology into disrepute? I would vote for Stephen Greer and his Disclosure Project. But there may be better candidates.

This assumes that ufology is a reputable subject in the first place, of course.

Christopher Allan, Stoke-on-Trent

Martin Kottmeyer's piece on William Dudley Pelley omits the most important fact about him; he was America's answer to Roderick Spode and tried to set himself up as a would-be Fuhrer, with his Christian Patriot Silver Shirts in the 1930s, which led to his wartime indictment for treason. A gospel of love and peace from such a guy can never be anything but pure hypocrisy.

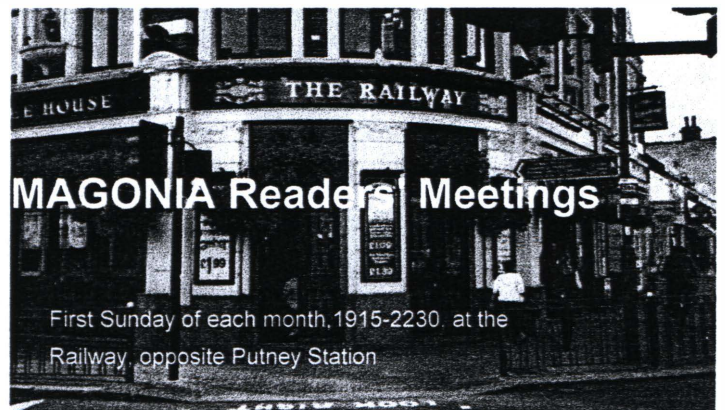
George Hunt Williamson is generally believed to have worked for Pelley in the early 1950s, and many early New Age figures link back to the I AM cult of Guy Ballard who was a close associate of Pelley.

Peter Rogerson, Manchester

EDITORIAL

This newsletter was originally published monthly, but only a few people took advantage of this facility to air their views on UFOs and related topics, so it is now published whenever sufficient material is available. A few copies are printed and sent to those who send letters and articles, or who exchange similar publications. All issues are available on the Magonia web site. Also, a plain-text version is usually posted on UFO UpDates.

Letters and articles are welcome, as are suitable illustrations, which can be printed in monochrome in the printed edition or can appear in colour on the web site. If enough suitable material is forthcoming we can return to publishing



The Railway

- ☺ Selection of real ales
- ☺ Meals and snacks served until 2200
- ☺ No jukebox or TV
- ☺ Reasonable prices

MAGONIA Supplement. Available on our web site - www.magonia.demon.co.uk. Printed copies for the favoured few. Letters and articles welcome. Send all contributions to the Editor: John Harney, 27 Enid Wood House, High Street, Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 1LN UK e-mail: magonia@harneyj.freemove.co.uk